

Frequently Asked Questions About U.S. Study

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Why Study in the United States?

1- **Quality:** U.S. Colleges are known worldwide for the quality of their education, facilities, resources and faculty.

Accreditation ensures that institutions continue to maintain these standards and qualities.

2- **Choice:** The U.S. education system is unrivalled worldwide in the choice of institutions it offers, academic and social environment, entry requirements, degree programs, and fields of specialization.

3- **Value:** As an investment in a student's future, a U.S. degree offers excellent value for the money. The wide range of tuition fees and living costs, plus some financial help from colleges has made study in the United States affordable for thousands of students.

4- **Flexibility:** One of the most distinctive features of U.S. universities and colleges is the flexibility in choice of courses within a college or university, but more importantly, there is also the option for students to move between one institution and another. Completing the first two years of a degree at one institution, usually a community college, and then moving to another is very common. There are approximately 3940 colleges in the USA. International students should be aware that the words 'university', 'school' and 'college' all carry the same meaning in the United States. Graduate study means either a Masters' Degree or Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) degree, while Undergraduate study means a Bachelor's Degree or an Associate Degree.

I'm thinking about studying in the United States. Where do I start?

This page contains some general information to get you started. EducationUSA centers around the world maintain libraries of information on U.S. institutions and offer advising consultation services to assist you with your college selection and application processes. Contact [your nearest EducationUSA center](#) to learn more about the services available to you.

How do I choose a college or university?

With over 3,500 accredited institutions in the United States, there is much to consider. Some particularly important factors include

- **Accreditation/recognition.** Be sure the institution is accredited by a body recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation and/or the U.S. Department of Education. Also check with a local educational advising center or your country's ministry of higher education. Some countries have additional requirements or recognize a smaller number of U.S. institutions.
- **Areas of study.** Even the biggest schools do not prepare students for every career. Be sure the types of programs that you are interested in are offered by the schools that you are considering.

- **Cost.** Tuition and fees can differ a lot between one U.S. university and another. Living costs will also vary depending on location. Look not only at costs but also at how much financial aid may be available in some cases expensive schools may be able to offer good financial aid.
- **Location.** Variations in climate and landscape are large in the United States. Consider also whether you would prefer a campus located in an urban, suburban, or rural setting.
- **Type of institution.** Institutions may be public, private, or religiously affiliated. They may be large or small, have many international students or only a few.
- Qualifications and research interests of faculty. A match with faculty interests is particularly important for graduate students.
- **Facilities and special resources or programs.** For instance, if you are not fluent in English, you may want to look for a school that has an English language program on campus.
- **Admissions standards.** How closely do your qualifications match those of students accepted to the school? This can give you an idea how likely you are to be accepted.
- **Availability of dormitories:** Most four-year institutions have dormitories for students, as do some two-year colleges. However, it is much less common to find dormitory facilities at two-year or technical colleges. Many universities require first-year students (freshmen) to live in the dormitories their first year. Some exceptions can be made for cultural or family reasons if the student prefers to live off-campus. Universities will often offer gender-segregated dormitories in addition to mixed dormitories. Some smaller, private or rural colleges require students to live in the dormitories for two or more, up to all four years. The university often provides information on dormitory facilities shortly after the student is accepted, at which time the student should indicate whether s/he would like to live in a dormitory and dormitory preference.
- **Public or private institutions:** Public institutions are generally less expensive than private institutions. Most of the largest universities in the United States are state colleges, which are public. These large, public institutions offer a vast array of areas of study, extra-curricular activities and other facilities. Due to their partial public source of funding, public institutions go by a state-mandated academic calendar and may be subject to certain student population and admission requirements. Private institutions generally make up the bulk of the smaller colleges in the United States. The quality of education and level of academic competition is not defined by whether the institution is public or private.
- **Co-education or single sex institutions:** Most of the academic institutions in the United States are co-educational. There are still seventy-one single sex institutions, sixty-seven of which are women's colleges, four of which are for men. The number of single sex colleges in the United States is declining as more single sex institutions integrate.
- **Student activities available on campus:** Academic institutions in the United States offer a very large variety of extra-curricular activities for university students. Student services fees paid by all students usually cover the costs of clubs and groups so students are not usually required to pay fees to join clubs. Large universities often have very competitive athletic teams but also offer sport clubs that compete within the university, which are much less competitive and less time-consuming. Colleges often have art, science and social clubs that students can join at their leisure. Most of the information on clubs can be found on each college's website.

Which are the best schools?

The United States does not publish any official list of best universities. Some private organizations compile "best" lists that have been created based on such factors as research funds or the opinions of professionals in a given field. These lists vary considerably in their conclusions, which is not surprising given that over 3,500 accredited U.S. universities and colleges currently operate, each with its own goals and strengths.

Often the most famous universities are also the most expensive and the most difficult to enter. The "best" university is going to be the one that is right for you—one that offers your field of study and meets other criteria important to you such as location, financing, housing, and facilities for international students.

When should I begin applying to U.S. universities?

If possible, begin at least one to two years before you plan to start your program. The U.S. academic year begins around the end of August and ends in May. Mid-year admission (to begin classes in January or February) may also be possible, but not in all cases. Application deadlines may fall as early as the end of November at some schools. You will also need time to register for, take, and wait for scores from standardized tests. Some of these tests are offered only once or twice each year.

Have you gotten a late start? Some schools offer more flexible rolling admissions and will accept applications at any time. In the United States, you also aren't required to begin an undergraduate program immediately after secondary school graduation if you need to wait a year because the deadline of the school in which you're interested in has passed, you can. At graduate schools, older students are even more common and some universities even offer programs specifically intended for mid-career individuals with substantial work experience. Still, starting early allows you the broadest range of choices and the best chances at financial aid without having to rush or wait.

What tests should I take?

The most commonly required tests are

TOEFL®: If English is not your native language, you must submit a TOEFL score. Generally a score of 61 to 80 on the Internet-based TOEFL (iBT), 173 to 250 on the computer-based version, or 500 to 550 on the paper-based version is required for admission to undergraduate and graduate programs in the United States, with graduate schools expecting the higher scores. A few schools may not require the TOEFL if you completed high school or college in the United States or if you graduated from a four-year, degree-granting institution where English is the language of instruction.

ITP. The Institutional TOEFL (ITP) is generally not accepted for U.S. university admission but it can provide inexpensive practice for TOEFL testing. Some admissions offices and scholarship programs may also accept ITP scores temporarily in the case of candidates who were not able to take the regular TOEFL prior to their application deadline, until regular TOEFL scores are available.

SAT® I: The SAT I may be required of some undergraduate applicants. No standard score is required; results are weighed with secondary school grades and other elements of the undergraduate application.

SAT II: Each SAT II examination tests knowledge in a specific subject area. One or more may be required of some undergraduate applicants.

GRE®: Most graduate applicants are required to submit results on the Graduate Record Examination general test and sometimes subject tests as well. Some graduate programs require specific minimum verbal or quantitative scores.

GMAT®: Graduate applicants in business- and accountancy-related areas usually must take the Graduate Management Admission Test.

DSST or **CLEP**. Not required, but thousands of U.S. college award undergraduate credit for these examinations (credit that may also be also helpful to some graduate students in fulfilling prerequisites). The thirty-seven DSST exams focus on seven subject areas including Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, Humanities, Business, Mathematics, and Applied Technology. CLEP exams offer over thirty additional choices in the areas of Composition and Literature, History and Social Sciences, Foreign Languages, Science and Mathematics, and Business. You can schedule these exams at any AMIDEAST office.

TSE®: The Test of Spoken English may be required for graduate students seeking teaching assistantships.

What is the process of applying to U.S. universities?

Application procedures will vary slightly from one university to another. Here are the common steps:

- Check scheduled dates for the TOEFL or any other exam required for your field and level of study. Register at least two months before the date you wish to take these exams.
- After research, make a list of schools that seem to match your needs and preferences. Send e-mails or letters to each requesting information and application forms.
- When you receive the application forms, complete one form for each of the three to seven universities that best meet your needs and send each one, along with the application fee, to the university. Your academic documents and test scores may be sent later, although applications received without the application fee will be returned. Test scores must be sent directly from the testing agency. Copies are not acceptable.
- Ask schools that you have attended to submit official transcripts showing the courses you took. If you took a school-leaving examination, also send a copy of these results. Most U.S. colleges and universities also ask for recommendations to be sent directly by teachers, employers, or others aware of your strengths. Documents not in English must be accompanied by a certified English translation.

What are the basics I should know about completing U.S. college and university application forms?

Use the same spelling of your name on all application forms, test applications, and so forth. Use the spelling that is on your passport if you have one. Differences in spelling from one document to another can cause problems.

Type or word process materials when possible, or print very neatly.

Usually students are asked to write an essay, personal statement, or statement of purpose. Specific guidelines may be provided by the institution but these essays usually serve the following purposes:

- Graduate programs are most interested in learning details about the applicant's desired area of study, career goals, and how the program being applied for meets the applicant's specific academic needs.
- At the undergraduate level, the essay allows the admissions staff to gain a better feel for the applicant's individual personality and background. How are you different from other applicants? The essay may also provide a good place to discuss your interests and skills that are not fully described in other parts of the application.

If you intend to major in performing arts areas such as music or dance, you may have to provide a videotape or an audiotape of a performance. Artists may be required to provide a portfolio or slides of their work.

You will be required to submit a financial statement from a bank stating that your family's account contains enough money to cover your expenses during the first year of university.

Use airmail for all materials sent from outside the United States or apply on-line if possible. Keep a copy of everything you send to institutions.

There will probably be items on the application that do not fit international students (such as Social Security number, zip code, and so forth). You can leave these blank— you may attach a cover letter explaining why certain items have been left unanswered if you feel anything might be confusing.

What are some other Web sites where I can find more information on U.S. study?

There are many sites on the Web where you can find information on U.S. colleges and universities and even applications to apply for their programs. Be aware that some of these sites do not include information on every U.S. institution; some list only those schools that have paid to be included.

For comprehensive, unbiased information on U.S. study, [visit your nearest EducationUSA center](#). You should always contact the colleges and universities that interest you directly to get the most current and complete information on programs.

- <http://educationusa.state.gov/> A great place for international students to start exploring U.S. study, with detailed information on the application process available to download and contact information for EducationUSA centers worldwide
- <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa>
- [http://www.students.gov /](http://www.students.gov/)
- <http://www.petersons.com/> This educational publishers Web site allows searching not only for collegiate and graduate programs, but also for English language programs, summer opportunities, distance education, private secondary schools, and much more.
- [http://www.edupass.org /](http://www.edupass.org/) Specifically for international students considering U.S. study, this site discusses admissions, financing, English language study, visas, cultural differences, U.S. life and more
- <http://www.al-jamiat.com/finaid> (Financial Aid for Arab Students)
- [http://www.internationalstudent.com /](http://www.internationalstudent.com/)
- <http://www.usjournal.com> (Designed for non-U.S. students and professionals who want to learn more about US universities, community colleges, English language programs, summer schools, internships and executive education opportunities)
- <http://www.communitycollegeusa.com/> Introduction specifically for international students to the U.S. community college system, with a search engine for finding programs.
- <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/CLAS/american-universities.html> Alphabetical list of links to the home pages of U.S. Universities granting bachelors or advanced degrees

University Search Websites

<http://www.petersons.com/educationusa> (US Department of State guide on graduate and undergraduate school searches, distance learning, executive education, MBA and many more. Also students can find practice questions for the following tests: SAT, ACT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, TOEFL, MCAT)

<http://www.collegeboard.com> (Applying + SAT information)

<http://www.collegeview.com> (College search, financial aid, scholarships)

<http://www.studyusa.com> (English language programs, graduate and undergraduate studies, community colleges)

<http://www2.collegeboard.com/search/sidebyside.jsp> (Comparing colleges)

F-1 Student Visa

Students who receive their I-20 form from the university in the U.S., should plan to apply for a visa three months prior to their intended date of departure, and preferably at least two months before their date of travel. Students should note the date of arrival required by the university and arrange their travel plans accordingly.

Information on payment procedures and required documents can be found on the embassy's student visa page.

http://syria.usembassy.gov/student_visas.html

Other visa-related websites are as follows:

- U.S. Department of State visa information homepage: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>
- Official Information on U.S. Visa Policy and Procedures Tips for US Visas
<http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/visapolicy/index.html>